

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 017337
ORIGIN IO-03

INFO OCT-01 AS-01 ISO-00 /005 R

66011

DRAFTED BY IO/UNESCO:RDFORSTER:JU

APPROVED BY IO:TLYNCH

-----260458Z 046293 /17

R 260334Z JAN 77

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 017337

NESCO

FOLLOWING REPEAT JERUSALEM 00096 ACTION SECSTATE INFO AMMAN
CAIRO DAMASCUS JIDDA TELAVIV USUN 20 JAN 77

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 00096

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS, JO

SUBJECT: ARAB EVICTIONS IN OLD JERUSALEM

REFS: (A) JERUSALEM 20; (B) AMMAN 17

1. SUMMARY: EVICTION OF ARABS FROM EXPANDED JEWISH
QUARTER OF OLD JERUSALEM HAS BEEN CRITICIZED BY
PRESTIGIOUS INDIVIDUALS IN BOTH INTERNATIONAL AND
LOCAL PRESS AT A TIME WHEN ISLAMIC CONGRESS COMMITTEE
HAS ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO RAISE JERUSALEM QUESTION IN
UNSC. ISRAELI MUNICIPALITY ARGUES IT HAS FOUGHT TO
REACH A COMPROMISE WHEREBY SOME ARAB PRESENCE WILL
REMAIN, AND GOI MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE IS REPORTEDLY
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RECONSIDERING CASES OF REMAINING ARAB RESIDENTS. IN
THE ABSENCE OF ANY EFFECTIVE ARAB ACTION, ISRAELIS
INTEND TO FOCUS NEXT ON RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MUSLIM QUARTER.
RESULTANT THINNING OF ARAB POPULATION THERE, ALBEIT
VOLUNTARY, MAY NEVERTHELESS PROVOKE CONTROVERSY AS
MIGHT EXTENSION OF ISRAELI EXCAVATIONS TO HEAVILY-
POPULATED OPHEL. END SUMMARY.

2. EVICTION OF THREE ARAB FAMILIES FROM EXPANDED JEWISH QUARTER ON DEC 28, 1977 (REF (A)) WAS FOLLOWED BY EVICTION OF ANOTHER FAMILY JAN 12, 1977. MOST, IF NOT ALL, ARABS INVOLVED WERE LONG-TERM RESIDENTS OF TRADITIONALLY-ARAB AREAS WITH THE LAND EXPROPRIATED BY THE GOI AFTER 1967 TO ENLARGE THE JEWISH QUARTER. THE APPROXIMATELY 20 ARAB FAMILIES WHICH REMAIN, MAINLY ON THE SOUTHERN SIDE OF THE STREET OF THE CHAIN GATE (BAB EL SILSILA), REPRESENT THE LAST ARAB PRESENCE IN THE EXPROPRIATED AREA.

3. DECEMBER EVICTIONS WERE SHARPLY CRITICIZED BY PROMINENT JERUSALEM CHURCHMEN IN A LETTER JAN 7 IN THE LONDON TIMES. FOUR SIGNATORIES INCLUDED CLIVE HANDFOR, DEAN OF ST. GEORGE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH. IN THE LETTER, THE CHURCHMEN WONDERED WHAT PUBLIC REACTION WOULD BE IF THREE JEWISH FAMILIES WERE BEING EVICTED FROM JEWISH QUARTER OF BETHAL GREEN IN LONDON TO MAKE WAY FOR NEW IMMIGRANTS.

4. CRITIQUE WAS ECHOED IN A LETTER IN THE JERUSALEM POST JAN 19 SIGNED BY 18 LOCALLY PROMINENT FIGURES (MEMBERS OF THE ISRAEL INTERFAITH COMMITTEE) INCLUDING SUCH WELL KNOWN ZIONISTS AS DR. B.M. RESNIKOFF OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE. SIGNATORIES CRITICIZED THE EVICTIONS AND "THE TREND TOWARDS 'RESTRICTIVE' QUARTERS WHICH THEY EVIDENCED," AND APPEALED TO MAYOR, MINISTERS OF HOUSING AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, AND CHAIRMAN OF MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON JERUSALEM TO PREVENT ANY

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FUTURE EVICTIONS.

5. AS DEPARTMENT IS NO DOUBT AWARE, WASHINGTON POST'S JERUSALEM CORRESPONDENT FOCUSED ON EVICTIONS IN LONG ARTICLE JAN 16. STORY WAS PICKED UP BY LOCAL ARABIC PRESS WHO STRESSED POINT THAT 6,500 ARABS HAD BEEN DISPLACED AND HUNDREDS OF HOMES DESTROYED AS A RESULT OF GOI POLICY SINCE 1968. WE UNDERSTAND STATISTICS WERE OBTAINED FROM QUAKERS' LEGAL AID OFFICE WHICH POST CONSIDERS RELIABLE.

6. POST ALSO NOTES THAT CURRENT BURST OF PUBLICITY FOLLOWS SOON AFTER RECOMMENDATION OF JERUSALEM COMMITTEE OF ISLAMIC LEAGUE TO RAISE JERUSALEM QUESTION IN UNSC. (REF B).

7. IN RECENT CONVERSATION, JERUSALEM'S DEPUTY MAYOR BENEVENISTI TOLD CONGEN THAT MUNICIPALITY HAD DONE ITS BEST TO PREVENT EVICTIONS AND HAD ACTUALLY WON A COMPROMISE

WHEREBY ARAB MERCHANTS COULD RETAIN THEIR SHOPS ALONG THE STREET OF THE CHAIN GATE. ACCORDING TO QUAKER LEGAL AID DIRECTOR, THE ISRAEL INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON JERUSALEM WILL STUDY THE CONDITIONS OF THE REMAINING ARAB RESIDENTS, AND HE IS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THEIR CHANCES OF STAYING.

8. WITH REBUILDING OF EXPANDED JEWISH QUARTER NEARLY COMPLETED, ATTENTION MAY NOW SHIFT TO RECONSTRUCTION OF ADJACENT ISLAMIC QUARTER. AN ISRAELI CORPORATION, WITH WHICH JERUSALEM ARABS HAVE DECLINED TO COOPERATE, HAS BEEN FORMED TO IMPROVE THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENCOURAGE A DECREASE IN POPULATION DENSITY. BENVENISTI INFORMS US THIS BODY HAS IN EFFECT BECOME A JOINT MUNICIPALITY-GOI ENTERPRESE AND THAT HE CHAIRS IT. HE FURTHER DENIES ANY INTENTION OF FORCING ARAB RESIDENTS TO MOVE ELSEWHERE. (SEE MECON WITH BENVENISTI, JAN 10, 1977.) ACCORDING
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TO AN ARAB ISRAELI LAWYER WHO HAS BEEN ASKED BY THE CORPORATION TO ACT AS AN INTERMEDIARY, RESIDENTS WILL BE OFFERED FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO RELINQUISH POSSESSION RIGHTS AND RELOCATE TO ARAB HOUSING PROJECTS NEAR BEIT HANINA AND BETHANY. ACTUAL OWNERSHIP OF MOST OF THE PROPERTY WOULD REMAIN WITH ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY (WHICH OWNS IT IN PERPETUITY) BUT ISRAELI CORPORATION WOULD HAVE RIGHTS TO OCCUPY PROPERTY UPON PAYMENT OF THE RENT. (COMMENT: WE HAVE NO INDICATION, HOWEVER, THAT IT IS INTENDED TO MOVE JEWS INTO THE AREA. BENEVENISTI HAS SAID HE HIMSELF OPPOSES REFURBISHING INTERIOR OF HOUSES.) BOTH ARAB AND ISRAELI SOURCES AGREE THAT MOVE TO NEW HOUSES LIKELY TO BE ATTRACTIVE TO MANY. ABOUT 800 APPLICANTS ARE ALREADY ON LISTS FOR THE INITIAL 200 UNITS PLANNED FOR BETHANY

9. ISRAELIS ARE ALSO PLANNING TO OPEN EXCAVATIONS IN THE OPHEL, THE PRESENT SITE OF THE ARABIC VILLAGE OF SILWAN AND HISTORIC SITE OF THE CITY OF KING DAVID. INITIALLY, AT LEAST, EXCAVATIONS ARE LIKELY TO BE CONFINED TO OPEN AREAS AND ESPECIALLY A TRACT PURCHASED BY ROTHCHILDS TO PERMIT FRENCH DIG IN 1913-14. HOWEVER, MEIR BEN DOV, FIELD DIRECTOR OF THE MAZAR DIGS, HAS ARGUED PREVIOUSLY TO CONGEN OFFICERS THAT PRE-48 PICTURES OF OPHEL AREA SHOW ONLY 3 OR 4 HOUSES IMPLYING THAT GOI COULD MAKE A CASE FOR EXPROPRIATIONS IF NECESSARY.

10. COMMENT: LIKE SO MANY ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUES, THE PRE-SERVATION AND DEVLOPMENT OF THE OLD CITY, WHICH COULD UNITE THE RWO PARTIES IN COMMON INTERESTS, INSTEAD DIVIDES THEM. THE ARABS REMAIN UNCOOPERATIVE AND INTRANSIGENT; THE ISRAELIS HIGHHANDED AND INSENSITIVE. IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY

ARAB INITIATIVE, NO DOUBT SOME WORK MUST BE DONE BY THE
ISRAELIS TO UPDATE THE BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE
ISLAMIC QUARTER, BUT THE USE OF COERCION BY ISRAELIS NEXT DOOR
ONLY INSURES THAT EVEN GOOD FAITH EFFORTS WILL BE VIEWED WITH
SUSPICION BY THE ARABS. EAST JERUSALEM'S TENUOUS LINKS TO
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THE ARAB HINTERLAND ARE EVEN NOW REDUCED TO THE
MT. OF OLIVES TO THE EAST AND SILWAN TO THE SOUTHEAST.
THE OPHEL EXCAVATIONS WHICH WILL, NO DOUBT, UNCOVER
LINKS TO THE DAVIDIC PAST WILL ONLY SERVE TO DRAW THE NOOSE
TIGHTER AND MAKE MORE DIFFICULT A SETTLEMENT SHOULD
THE ARAB PARTIES, PARTICULARLY SAUDI ARABIS, INSIST THAT
EAST JERUSALEM BE INCLUDED IN AN OVERALL ARAB-ISRAELI
AGREEMENT.
NEWLIN.
UNQUOTE VANCE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MOSLEMS, REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, PLACES OF WORSHIP, LAND NATIONALIZATION
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Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 26-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE017337
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: RDFORSTER:JU
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770027-1059
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From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770116/aaaaanoz.tel
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Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
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Office: ORIGIN IO
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 JERUSALEM 20, 77 AMMAN 17
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3494602
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ARAB EVICTIONS IN OLD JERUSALEM
TAGS: PFOR, IS, JO
To: PARIS
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/66dddad0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009